

Homily for the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Times

November 4-5, 2017

Readings: Malachi 1:14B-2:2B, 8-10; 1 Thessalonians 2:7B-9, 13; Matthew 23: 1-12

Preacher: Cathy Kamp

“It’s a busy time.” How often do we hear this? How often do we say this? Especially as the school year gets underway, Fall sports gear up, and the prospect of Christmas preparations loom on the horizon, everyone is talking about how busy they are. In our society, it’s something of a badge of honor. The busier you are, the more “swamped” you perceive yourself to be, the more important and respected you must be. If your children are super busy, you must be getting it right as a parent.

Not so, Jesus would tell us. Not so.

This week’s Gospel from Matthew warns against seeking honor and placing heavy burdens on others. It warns against allowing anything or anyone to become our master but the one Master, the Christ. The psalmist tells us that Jesus is not only our Master; the Lord is our peace. Peace is what we must seek—not honor, not more distractions and busyness, but peace.

Fortunately, Jesus also gives us the path forward for achieving this peace: to follow him and lead others to him with humble hearts. “The greatest among you must be your servant,” Jesus teaches. “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” What does this look like in our busy, over-scheduled lives?

I can only speak for myself. Lay pastoral ministers who serve the Church are no more immune than anyone else from getting caught up in the busyness of life. Recently, I had a revelation that I am still pondering and praying over. In the Fall, parish life becomes especially “busy” as requests for financial assistance pour in from those living in poverty, as they, like us, anticipate the holiday season. This

aspect of ministry can be the most challenging and the most joyful as we embrace Pope Francis' call to encounter others. The challenge is moving beyond responding to the immediate need to walking with people, coming to understand them and the dilemmas they may be facing, and striving toward meaningful, hope-filled solutions.

As I get busy in the Fall with our St. Joseph's stewardship renewal, Scripture studies starting, ChristLife coming to the parish ... a call for assistance that should be an invitation into encounter can suddenly feel burdensome. Instead of my heart opening wide, I might sense resistance going up like a brick wall. Or worse, that wall may go up without me taking the time to recognize what is happening. An urgent request for assistance might sit there while I attend to routine emails and other busy work. This is the opposite of allowing the peace of Christ to fill our hearts, the opposite of responding to the call to encounter.

Saint Paul writes to the Thessalonians, "With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us." Jesus requires that we give our very selves to those we encounter—in our homes, our workplaces, our schools, our communities. But "our very selves" requires more than signing up and doing the minimum to check one more thing off our to-do lists; it means taking the time to be present to others, to listen with our hearts, and to engage with each other's joys and sorrows. This is being Christ to others; this is sharing the merciful love of Jesus with those around us; this is being humble servants to one another. This is where we find peace. This is where we conquer the busyness and "drain the swamp" of our own craziness.

Can we take up this challenge in today's Gospel? Can we humble ourselves and put the busyness of life in its proper place, renewing our baptismal covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ, embracing God as the Master of our hearts and our lives? Can we allow the Spirit to move us humbly toward meaningful encounters in the service of others?

The rewards of placing our hope in the Lord are great, promising us peace both now and forever.